Fall 2007

Mobility Matters

TRANSPORTATION ISSUES IN THE NJTPA REGION

Projects Making A Difference

Getting It Right

Across the NJTPA region—13 northern and central New Jersey counties—there are many examples of transportation projects "getting it right." These projects make travel easier and safer for residents, reduce traffic congestion, offer alternatives for daily commutes and encourage sustainable growth. These projects rarely receive the public recognition they deserve, because in the world of transportation, as elsewhere, there often is more focus on things that go wrong rather than things that go right.

This issue of *Mobility Matters* attempts to give a number of these projects their due. Most were not huge headline-grabbers beyond their location and they were certainly not among the most expensive transportation improvements undertaken in the region. However, they stand as good examples of projects that effectively do what they were designed to do—improve the region's transportation system.

Housing Near Transit

'New urban' housing boosts downtown Metuchen

New Jersey's train stations are more than just hubs for commuter travel. Increasingly, they are anchors for creating housing and other development to revitalize downtown business districts and realize the state's Smart Growth goals.

The Franklin Square housing development in downtown Metuchen was specifically designed with these objectives in mind. In 1998, the town invited developers to create housing on the former site of a school near its train station. After much community input, the chosen developer constructed 105 housing units, paying special attention to fitting the design to the scale and look of the downtown while minimizing traffic and other impacts of concern to residents.

Units have a townhouse appearance (though they contain stacked apartments) and make extensive use of brick to create an appealing streetscape. They include rear courtyards for use by residents, and parking was dispersed throughout the site. The design was a prime example of "new urbanist" architecture.

The homes have been purchased by "people who are attracted to living downtown and using mass transit," Metuchen Mayor Ed O'Brien says. They are mostly couples without children (or, in real estate parlance, DINKs—Double Income, No Kids). Ten units were set aside for affordable housing.

"The residents have been a real asset in patronizing downtown businesses," the mayor says. The success of Franklin Square has prompted plans for additional downtown development. The town recently

Cont'd on next page

Photo: Bill Wittkop

Cont'd from previous page

approved a zoning ordinance that foresees the creation of a six-acre town center, with mixed housing, retail and office uses—also within walking distance of the train station.

Numerous other towns are getting into the act. Cranford, Rahway, South Orange and Morristown are among towns with new developments going up or planned near their train stations. The state has lent support, through programs promoting Transit Oriented Development (TOD) including the Transit Village Initiative run by the State Department of Transportation and NJ Transit.

To make a TOD project successful, Mayor O'Brien says, towns must not only "make sure to structure development consistent with the town's fiscal policy" but pay attention to aesthetics and community involvement. He notes that in advancing the recent zoning ordinance, the town held a series of meetings and workshops, creating a "visioning process that allowed people to buy into it." It was "as transparent as possible." ●

Traffic Circle Replacement

Westfield roundabout improves traffic

Traffic circles were once the state-of-the-art approach to circulating vehicles through tricky interchanges of busy roadways. For a time, New Jersey had nearly 70 circles in operation, most built in the 1920s and 1930s. As years passed and more and more cars filled the roads, though, the circles grew infamous for congestion, accidents and driver confusion over who had the right-of-way.

The New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT) has eliminated or reconfigured about half of the state's traffic circles in favor of designs to improve traffic flow in places such as Westfield in Union County, Brielle in Monmouth County, Bound Brook in Somerset County, and Clifton in Passaic County, among others.

At the old circle in Westfield, more than 250 accidents were recorded in or adjacent to the circle between 1998 and 2000. "It was just a bad situation altogether," says Union County Assistant Engineer Timothy Mettlen.

The NJDOT decided to reconfigure, rather than eliminate, the Westfield circle. NJDOT first proposed removing the circle and putting a new 'T' intersection in its place, but further study found a modern "roundabout" would be a better, more cost-effective and less intrusive solution, says Neal Toglia, a design engineer with Jacobs Edwards and Kelcey, a consulting firm that worked on the project. Work on the roundabout began in 2004.

"It has worked well," says Toglia. "The principle is that the cars in the roundabout itself now have the right of way to exit and anyone entering has to yield to the cars already in the circle."

The key problem with the old circle was a "conflict point" where state Route 28 (known as South Avenue) entered the circle, Mettlen said. South Avenue now enters the circle at a right angle, forcing drivers to physically stop and yield to enter the roundabout instead of simply driving in. Other approaches to the circle were

Cont'd on next page

THE NJTPA

The NJTPA is the federally authorized Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the 6.5 million people in the 13-county northern New Jersey region. Each year, the NJTPA oversees over $2.5 billion in transportation investments. The NJTPA evaluates and approves proposed transportation improvement projects and provides a forum for interagency cooperation and public input into funding decisions. It also sponsors and conducts studies, assists county planning agencies and monitors compliance with national air quality goals. The NJTPA serves the fourth most populous MPO region in the country. The NJTPA Board consists of one elected official from each of the region's 13 counties and two largest cities, Newark and Jersey City. The Board also includes a Governor's Representative, the Commissioner of the NJ Department of Transportation, the Executive Directors of NJ Transit and the Port Authority of NY & NJ and a Citizens' Representative appointed by the Governor. NJTPA Board meetings are held bi-monthly and are open to the public.

Mobility Matters

Mobility Matters is published by the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority, Inc. with funding from the Federal Transit Administration and the Federal Highway Administration. The NJTPA is solely responsible for its contents.

Executive Editor: Joel S. Weiner, NJTPA, Executive Director
Contributing Editors: David Behrend, Ted Ritter, Mark Solof, Beverly Morris
Design: Suzanne G. Bennett
Host Agency: New Jersey Institute of Technology

Inquiries should be addressed to:
The North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority, Inc.
One Newark Center, 17th Floor
Newark, New Jersey 07102
Phone: 973.639.8400
Fax: 973.639.1953
www.njtpa.org

NJTPA Board of Trustees

Daniel P. Sullivan, *Chairman—Freeholder, Union County*

Susan Zellman, *First Vice Chairman—Freeholder, Sussex County*

Dennis McNerney, *Second Vice Chairman—Bergen County Executive*

John DiMaio, *Third Vice Chairman—Freeholder, Warren County*

Thomas DeGise, *Secretary—Hudson County Executive*

Joseph DiVincenzo—*Essex County Executive*

George D. Muller—*Freeholder, Hunterdon County*

Jerramiah T. Healy—*Mayor, Jersey City*

David B. Crabiel—*Freeholder, Middlesex County*

William C. Barham—*Freeholder, Monmouth County*

Gene F. Feyl—*Freeholder, Morris County*

Cory A. Booker—*Mayor, City of Newark*

James F. Lacey—*Freeholder, Ocean County*

Elease Evans—*Freeholder, Passaic County*

Peter S. Palmer—*Freeholder, Somerset County*

A. Matthew Boxer—*Governor's Representative*

Kris Kolluri—*Commissioner, NJDOT*

Richard R. Sarles—*Executive Director, NJ Transit*

Anthony Shorris—*Executive Director, Port Authority NY & NJ*

Vacant—*Citizens' Representative*

Successful Suburban Transit

Ocean County bus connects residents with jobs, health care

Cont'd from previous page

also realigned to be indirect, requiring drivers to slow down and yield.

"It was challenging to do a project like this in such a busy, highly-visible location," notes NJTPA Chairman Daniel P. Sullivan, a Union County Freeholder. "But it wound up being a good project that improved safety for motorists and pedestrians."

Mettlen also says cooperation and coordination went a long way toward helping this project get it right. "NJDOT didn't have to do anything they didn't want to, but they gave us their plans, and let us have our input," he says. "And I think our input made some differences. They weren't going to change the South Avenue approach until we asked about that."

The $2.4 million project also included an upgraded traffic signal ahead of the western approach; replacement of obsolete signals nearby; alignment modification and turning restrictions at Route 28 and Westfield Avenue south of the circle; improved crosswalks; more vertical clearance under NJ Transit's Raritan Valley Line railroad bridge, and more.

"The entire area was repaved, including new roadway striping, signs, curbing, and crosswalks," Toglia says. "We also did some streetscaping and landscaping to keep the project character with the historic nature of the area. That was an important thing to the community." The trade journal New York Construction News noted that and other features of the circle in giving the project one of its Best of 2005 awards in the highway and roadway category: "The reconfiguring of [the] traffic circle in Westfield . . . is proof that good construction projects sometimes come in small packages," the journal noted. ●

The Toms River Connection has opened up a world of transportation possibilities for low-income residents of several barrier island communities in Ocean County. The fixed-route bus service gives access to county services, a hospital, major retailers and more activities on Route 37 in Toms River and other nearby towns. It provided nearly 105,000 passenger trips last year.

Collaboration has been the key to success for the connection, which began in winter 2001 after receiving inspiration from welfare-reform initiatives of the 1990s and strong support from county freeholders. The NJTPA provided federal funding (matched by the state) from the Federal Transit Administration's Job Access and Reverse Commute program, which seeks to increase job access for disadvantaged populations.

The service runs from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m., making 10 round trips a day between Toms River and Lavallette, operating seven days a week in summer and six days a week the rest of the year. The one-way fare is $1 for local service and $1.40 for a transfer to NJ Transit, although seniors and people with disabilities are eligible for reduced fares.

The service is popular today, but a lot of homework was needed before it began, says Kathy Edmond, director of Ocean Ride, the county's transit service.

Photo: Ocean County

"We decided that it would be strategic to include NJ Transit in the early stages of the planning process," Edmond says. Working with NJ Transit staff, the county studied Geographic Information System (GIS) data, and conducted fieldwork, mapping out and testing potential routes. "There was a great benefit from their knowledge in terms of service development and planning," Edmond says.

Once a preliminary route was planned out on a map, NJ Transit bus stop specialists worked with Ocean Ride on everything from potential locations and technical measurements for bus stops, to signage and drafting the required legal ordinances.

"That early planning focus was really crucial to success," Edmond emphasizes.

Ocean Ride next enlisted the help of the Greater Mercer Transportation Management Association (TMA), which helped plan the service's logo and marketing, including a standard Ocean Ride bus stop sign and bright red transit schedule holder for display on the same sign pole.

Ocean Ride worked with the TMA on marketing the Toms River Connection, using key chains, flyers, coin pouches, jar openers, bag handles, and a specially created placemat with a three-dimensional map of the bus route. "All those visuals really help," Edmond says. "We really tried to think of things from the rider's viewpoint and make public transit a little more approachable."

Developing the Toms River Connection "was really a learning process in terms of identifying transportation needs and gaps," Edmond says, but the bus route is now Ocean Ride's biggest success story based on ridership and fare box recovery data. Ridership on the Toms River Connection currently accounts for about 25 percent of total transit ridership in the county, and the county hired a private contractor to operate the buses as efficiently as possible.

Also, a pilot program was launched earlier this year with the Ocean County Social Services Board to provide passes to Medicaid-eligible residents, allowing them to take the Toms River Connection to medical appointments. These residents can keep their monthly passes to use transit for other purposes.

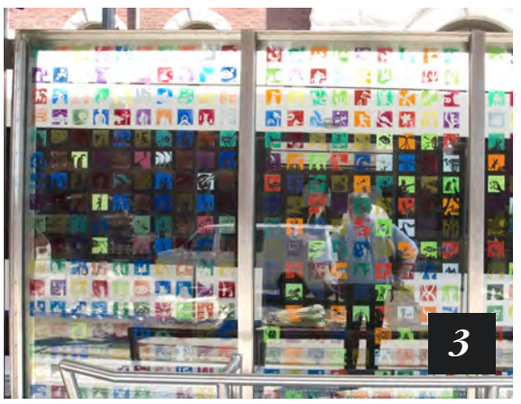
"A program such as this provides a host of benefits to many our residents," says Ocean County Freeholder James F. Lacey. "Connecting residents by providing transportation to jobs, services, and medical appointments helps make an important difference in their lives." ●

Transit Art

Program Lends Artistic Touch to Transit Projects

NJ Transit launched its Transit Arts program in 1994 as a pilot project on the first segment of the Hudson-Bergen Light Rail. Thirty artists worked with planners, designers, and the public to create more than 50 varied works of art for display in a dozen light rail stations. The program was such a big success that NJ Transit expanded it in 1996 to include other projects.

NJ Transit officials say the program was designed to provide a framework for promoting the development of art in public spaces, while enhancing the public transportation experience and the quality of life for transit riders and residents. "Transit Arts is based on the philosophy that art is essential to the overall transportation experience, and that it needs to be designed into a project from the beginning," explains NJ Transit's Courtney Carroll.



1. Sculpture,16-feet-tall, celebrating railroading on the roadway entering Union Station, Union County, by George Greenamyer. 2. Welcoming arch at the Lyons train station, Somerset County, by Lauren Ewing. 3. Mural of tiles at the Newark Light Rail's Broad Street station by Ik-Joong Kang. 4. Dinosaur head sculpture at the Hudson Bergen Light Rail Transit's Bergenline Avenue station by Alison Sky, inspired by the prehistoric formation of the Palisades.

5. Martin Luther King, Jr. bust at the Hudson Bergen Light Rail Transit station at MLK Drive in Jersey City, by Jonathan Shahn. 6. Mosaic ball, part of a sculpture at Ramsey's Route 17 station in Bergen County by Ned Smyth.

in Northern New Jersey

7. Walkway artwork called River Ribbons, at the Paterson Station in Passaic County by Charles Fahlen. ***8.*** *Tribute to musicians at the Newark Light Rail's Grove Street Station by Valerie Maynard.* ***9.*** *Garden sculpture combining artwork and landscaping at the Montclair State University Station, Essex County, by Alice Adams.*

The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) allows up to 5 percent of the total cost of FTA-funded projects to be spent on artwork. Further, the state's Arts Inclusion Act mandates that all state-funded projects allocate up to 1.5 percent of construction costs for art.

NJ Transit says the program is also about celebrating the cultural identity of each location through art that reflects the distinct values and identity of each community that NJ Transit serves. "The artwork beautifies our stations and enhances the traveling experience for our commuters, while also providing a sense of ownership to the communities we serve," says Transit Arts Program Manager Sheila McKoy.

To date, the Transit Arts Program has facilitated more than 160 art installations throughout the NJ Transit system. The photos are examples of how the program successfully integrates engineering and art at transit facilities in the NJTPA region. *All photos by Mike Rosenthal /NJ Transit.*

10. *Leaded glass panels in the waiting room windows of the restored historic train station in Plainfield, Union County, by David Wilson.* ***11.*** *Two-sided tile mosaics on platform railings at the refurbished train station in Hazlet, Monmouth County, by Yakov Ishakov. This one pays tribute to Doctor John Hazlett, the town's founding father.* ***12.*** *One of two 30-by-6-foot glass mosaics by Mac Adams called Wetlands (Summer) at the Frank R. Lautenberg/Secaucus Junction Station, Hudson County.*

Late Night Shuttle

Essex 'Night Owl' links workers with airport jobs

Cynthia Graham is already hard at work while most people are still soundly sleeping. The Newark resident works for US Airways at Newark Liberty International Airport—and her shifts typically start at 4 a.m. and end at 10 a.m.

The challenge for Graham and others who work late shifts at the airport and do not have a car is finding a way to and from the job. For her and many others, the Essex County Night Owl—servicing Newark Penn Station and nearby residential areas every day from 1 a.m. to 5 a.m.—is the answer to that dilemma.

"Working these hours and having direct transportation is a real benefit to me, because I am home for my kids," Graham says. "I can focus on my prime responsibility, which is my children."

Meadowlink, the oldest Transportation Management Association (TMA) in New Jersey, provides the Essex County Night Owl service in partnership with Essex County and NJ Transit. Funding comes from the federal government's Job Access and Reverse Commute program, Essex County and the New Jersey Department of Human Services.

The Night Owl provides transportation to Newark Penn Station—where riders can take a bus to Newark Airport or trains to New York City—from residential areas in Newark, Orange, East Orange and Irvington. Passengers referred by employers, workforce developers and social service agencies can make reservations 24 hours in advance, including ongoing, standing reservations.

The service's five shuttle buses provide nearly 27,000 passenger trips a year, with about 120 riders on weeknights and 60 on weekends, according to Meadowlink figures. It attracts an average of 40 new riders a month, with ridership highest around the year-end holidays, mainly because of the seasonal nature of jobs in the shipping industry at the airport.

Meadowlink credits much of the service's success to a confluence of three factors, says

Krishna Murthy, the TMA's Executive Director. First, a densely developed area with many low-income residents in need of transportation is near the station and the airport. In addition, there is a high concentration of jobs with non-traditional schedules at the airport. Finally, Newark Penn Station provides a transit hub.

The key goal of the Night Owl is to provide service for the so-called "last mile," Murthy says. The term refers to the fact that often riders can get most of the way to their destination but lack the transit connection to make that final link. Here, the missing piece of the transportation puzzle is the connection between Penn Station and home for workers traveling in the early-morning hours.

"By filling this gap, the Essex Night Owl allows its passengers to build new lives," Murthy says.

That fact is not lost on Newark resident Karen Drakes, a Continental Airlines employee who has been using the Night Owl service for five years to get to her 5 a.m. shift at the airport.

"There isn't direct service to Newark Penn Station from where I live," Drakes says. "I would be stuck taking a taxi every day. Without the Night Owl, I would have no other option. This service benefits me in a way that I can't even explain." ●

Brownfield Redevelopment

Newark Fed-Ex warehouse provides jobs, improves freight

The package processing facility opened by Federal Express in Spring 2006 on Avenue L in Newark is a model for bringing derelict former industrial properties back into productive use. Similar "brownfields" dot the New Jersey landscape, particularly in and around major cities.

Fed-Ex built its facility on 13 acres that sat empty for more than 20 years. In the 1930s, a company made dyes and pigments there. Later a pesticide manufacturer used the site. Finally, in the 1960s, it housed a drum cleaning operation, becoming known as the "Albert Steel Drum" site after the company that did this work.

These uses left extensive chemical contamination at the site. Potential developers shunned the land, favoring alternative sites in the suburbs that did not need clean up or pose the threat of future liabilities from undiscovered pollution.

But the Albert Steel Drum site had potential advantages. A 2003 study by the NJTPA and the New Jersey Institute of Technology (NJIT) found that the site, like most once-industrial brownfields in northern New Jersey, has excellent transportation connections. This can "mean savings in both cost and time for businesses seeking to optimize goods distribution," the report says. The Albert Steel Drum site is within a mile of both the port and airport and adjacent to the New Jersey Turnpike and other major highways.

Capitalizing on this locational advantage took some doing. James Mack, NJIT Director of Brownfields Technology, notes that the site had "a range of contaminants," including volatile organic compounds, PCBs and heavy metals such as lead, arsenic and mercury. Moreover, the property owner could not afford the extensive clean up required by the state Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP).

The solution came from a variety of sources: a developer, Joseph Morris, who recognized the property's advantages and

Cont'd on next page

Suburban Shopping Center Park-and-Ride

Excess parking meets commuter needs at Rockaway Mall

Each weekday in northern and central New Jersey, thousands of commuters drive to park-and-ride lots, lock their vehicles, and catch buses or trains to work. In general, park-and-rides have been a success, but some work better than others, and still others are not exactly welcomed by neighbors. But the park-and-ride lot strategically located at Morris County's popular Rockaway Mall is a notable success.

The park-and-ride was established through a per-parking-space lease agreement with the mall, located near a designated Route 80 exit (a similar facility is located at the Livingston Mall and at other locations in the state).

"The location is very logical," says Deena Cybulski, an Assistant Director in Morris County's Division of Transportation. "And unless you were looking for it you wouldn't even know it was there. That sounds like a negative, but it's really a positive when you think of some people not wanting park-and-rides in their areas. It was just an underused area of the mall parking lot that was turned into a good use."

Three Morris County Metro buses stop at the park-and-ride, as well as some Lakeland buses that go into New York City. "That's probably the bulk of the facility's use, but there are also some carpools and vanpools that use it, " says Don Watt, Vice President of TransOptions, a non-profit Transportation Management Association serving northwestern New Jersey. "It's very much a mixed-use thing."

In addition, Watt says the convenient Rockaway Mall location provides easy access for the buses and the commuters who eventually ride them, without creating conflicts with those who come to the mall to shop. "The buses just pull up right to where the people are waiting in the morning and, since it's so early, there's no other traffic in the mall."

Commuters can easily identify their designated spaces, which are marked with green stripes. Special signs also help direct motorists to the proper location. All mall parking facilities, including the park-and-ride, are well-lighted and regularly patrolled by security staff.

The park-and-ride now serves more than 400 vehicles per day, according to Watt. "The lot's filled up by 7:30 in the morning," he says. "The mall is very happy with this facility; they want to see it keep going and they even want to expand it."

Between 200 and 300 more spaces should be added to allow for anticipated growth in the area, Watt says. That would require the park-and-ride to be moved to another section of the mall parking lot nearby.

In the meantime, the park-and-ride is doing its part to reduce the volume of vechicles on the area's busy highways.

"This is an extremely high-volume and congested area for commuter and commercial traffic," says Morris County Freeholder Gene F. Feyl. "We are continuously looking for creative ways to reduce vehicle counts without impacting our residential roads. The relief provided by park-and-ride lots provides economic, air quality, and commuter benefits." ●

photo: Dwight Hiscano

Cont'd from previous page

agreed to help finance the clean-up as part of a purchase agreement; state programs, coordinated by NJDEP and the NJ Department of Commerce, that provide financial incentives, technical assistance and legal protections for those reclaiming brownfields; the City of Newark, which issued permits and approvals; and new technologies pioneered by NJIT to cost-effectively identify and address contamination.

Special challenges included disposing of soil contaminated by heavy metals, which required special processing costing up to $300 a cubic yard, and the need to create a drainage system to prevent rainwater from reaching and carrying away contaminants that remain at the site.

The warehouse built on the site was designed specifically for Fed-Ex. It is a "cross-dock" facility: packages are unloaded from trucks on one side, processed and sorted, then loaded into other trucks on the opposite side. It employs 150 workers and pays $1 million in annual taxes to Newark.

"This is an example of how the process can work when all stakeholders cooperate to create a win-win situation," Mack says. "It shows that brownfields redevelopment can be done even with badly contaminated properties." Hundreds of acres of brownfields nearby are being considered for similar freight-related redevelopment.

photo: Bill Wittkop

Suburban Pedestrian Bridge

Bridgewater/Somerville overpass makes walking to shopping, schools, homes safer

Two busy state highways, a major mall, two high schools and an apartment complex made for a complicated mix when it came to improving pedestrian mobility and safety in Somerset County's regional center.

Soon after the state designated Bridgewater, Raritan and Somerville a regional center in 1996, the county began working with the New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT) to consider needed transportation improvements.

One safety "hot spot" identified was a dangerous at-grade pedestrian crossing between Bridgewater and Somerville townships, says Somerset County Transportation/Land Use Planner Walter Lane. At the site along Cloverleaf Drive, a ramp connects westbound Route 22 with northbound Route 202/206. The busy Bridgewater Commons mall, Somerville and Immaculata high schools, and an apartment complex—all nearby—generate considerable pedestrian traffic. The ramp often saw heavy traffic traveling at 50 miles-per-hour or more. And while an underpass already allowed pedestrians to cross Route 22, no such facility existed for those crossing the Route 202/206 ramp.

"There had never been an accident at this location, but it was our concern that it was only a matter of time before someone got hit crossing there," says Lane, noting that the county's freeholders already had identified the spot as a location for a priority project.

Officials came up with two possible solutions: either another pedestrian tunnel—like the one under Route 22—or a pedestrian overpass. Planners met with various stakeholders—county officials, police, and student councils of Immaculata and Somerville high schools.

"We showed them both options and asked, 'which would you rather use,'" Lane recalls. "Everyone overwhelmingly supported the overpass, which is different from what we thought would happen."

Students and other stakeholders said they would feel less confined and safer on an overpass.

"The public outreach was there," notes Principal County Engineer John Kendzulak. "We figured out the people who would be using the bridge and said, 'Let's talk to them.'"

NJDOT agreed to provide $2.5 million funding for design and construction, while the county agreed to plan, build and maintain the facility, which the county owns.

Making the overpass aesthetically pleasing was a key focus, Lane says. "We didn't want to create a cattle shoot or anything like that, where it was all fenced in," he says.

Kendzulak adds: "We also wanted it to complement the surrounding area."

Designers also had to keep in mind that the walkway would play a symbolic role in welcoming visitors to the regional center of Bridgewater, Raritan and Somerville.

The result of all this consultation, planning and design was a main span consisting of an impressive steel arch with a reinforced concrete bridge deck suspended from steel cables. The rest of the structure consists of tubular steel "stringers" on concrete piers.

The bridge was integrated into the mall through sidewalk alignment and a crosswalk leading to the entrance of Macy's department store, helping to create a "more seamless pedestrian system," according to Lane.

As Kendzulak explains, "It's not like the bridge is dumping you out into some remote area of the mall; it ends at a logical point."

On the bridge's other end, carefully placed fencing and block retaining walls were constructed to direct pedestrian traffic and contain a staircase and a ramp accessible by wheelchairs.

The bridge has proven popular with pedestrians. It has been "phenomenally" well-used by several hundred people each day, Lane says. "They actually had to stop the ribbon cutting ceremony four different times because people were trying to cross the new bridge."

Somerset County Freeholder Peter S. Palmer says the bridge addresses a transportation need and improves safety in a vital location. "There are people that now walk across that wouldn't even think of doing it before because it just wasn't a safe location," he notes. "This was a critical link that made a lot of sense; and it was a smart link."

photo: Somerset County

New Trans-Hudson Ferry

Growing community enjoys marine travel alternative

Ferries have come to serve an important niche in the transportation system of the region. They supplement the rail and bus system for accessing Manhattan from across the Hudson River as well as from the New Jersey shore. For many riders, they offer quicker trips—at a premium price—and, in good weather, an open air ride and often captivating views.

Following 9/11, ferries proved to be a valuable regional asset, flexibly responding to the surge in demand created by the loss of a PATH line and vehicle restrictions at the tunnels. Still, private ferry operators, who do not receive public operating funding, face hurdles in making routes profitable; a number have been curtailed in recent years.

The newest ferry route—and one with great promise for long term success—opened March 6, 2007 in Edgewater, Bergen County. Like other towns that form the "Gold Coast" along the Hudson River, Edgewater's proximity to Manhattan drove a real estate boom over the past two decades. Factories that once lined the main drag, River Road, have been transformed into condos and shopping centers.

A news reporter who works at Associated Press in Manhattan walks to the ferry terminal each morning from her home in Fort Lee, one town over. She previously took the bus through the Lincoln Tunnel but found sitting in traffic underground "a little claustrophobic, especially after 9/11."

Despite the added cost—$7 one way compared to $3.50 for the bus—she says the ferry is worth it: "It's very convenient. What's their slogan? 'The civilized commute.' I definitely think that's true."

Time savings are also an attraction. The Bergen Record spoke to one rider who takes the ferry every day: "The ferry takes about 12 minutes; the bus from Edgewater to the Port Authority typically takes about 45 minutes in no traffic."

Bergen County Executive Dennis McNerney says, "The Edgewater Ferry gives residents a valuable travel alternative, one that helps protect the environment and eases road congestion."

The new ferry reclaims a key aspect of Edgewater history. The town was a terminal for trans-Hudson ferries dating back to colonial times. For the first half of the 20th century, a ferry between Edgewater and 125th street in Manhattan was actively used by New Jersey commuters and by New Yorkers traveling to the nearby Palisades Amusement Park (which closed in 1971). The ferry ceased in 1951 as a result of the easier auto access provided by the George Washington Bridge and Lincoln Tunnel.

What's old is new again. ●

Key Bridge Replacement

Modern drawbridge over Barnegat Bay improves traffic flow, access

Over the past year, the Mantoloking Bridge over Barnegat Bay has been "closed" far more frequently than the old one ever was. In this case, though, that's a good thing.

The new drawbridge, completed in May 2006, has to be opened about 2,000 times a year to let boats pass—as opposed to roughly 6,000 times a year with the old, lower span, says Ocean County Engineer Ronald A. Lotrecchio. That means better traffic flow on Mantoloking Road between Brick on the bay's western shore and Mantoloking to the east.

"Our openings are down to the level we thought they'd be," says Lotrecchio, whose office oversaw removal of the old span and construction of the new bridge. In addition, when the bridge operator does open the new bridge, it stays up for far less time. The new bridge opens and closes in less than three minutes, down from over five and a half minutes, cutting waiting time for cars nearly in half.

Keeping openings shorter and less frequent is just one of the many benefits of the new bridge, which was built with $20 million of federal funding, $12 million of which came through the NJTPA. The old bridge had been under severe weight restrictions since 1992, with no vehicle weighing more than 4 tons allowed. The new one can handle heavier vehicles, meaning that fire engines and other emergency vehicles, as well as delivery trucks, can cross, eliminating the need to take a much longer, circuitous route between the island and mainland, Lotrecchio points out.

The new bridge also is 10 feet wider, which will allow it to play a vital role if storms or flooding ever force the evacuation of the barrier island. In that event, two lanes could carry traffic bound west for the mainland, while a third east-

Cont'd on next page

Cont'd from previous page

bound lane would let emergency vehicles get to the island.

While the design of the new bridge mainly focused on improving traffic flow and safety on this increasingly busy county road, recreational uses—particularly fishing and crabbing—were not forgotten. The county preserved a section of the old bridge on the Brick side, and it now serves as a pier for fishing and crabbing.

New walking paths also allow for exploration of the bay's shoreline near and beneath the new bridge.

The new bay access has proven popular. Fortunately, as part of its plans for the area, the county joined with Brick Township in acquiring Traders Cove Marina just northwest of the bridge. The township acquired two-thirds of the property and now is preparing a waterfront improvement plan as it oversees the continued operation of the marina. Meanwhile, the county now owns the other third, which it will turn into a "park-like" setting with parking and restroom facilities needed by those using the fishing pier and paths, Lotrecchio says.

"We're enhancing the waterfront," says Ocean County Freeholder James F. Lacey. "In many ways—from mobility, to safety, to recreation—that has proven true for the entire project."

Redesigned Urban Intersection

Upgraded Union City crossroads benefits drivers, pedestrians

Kennedy Boulevard is a key roadway spine running the length of densely populated Hudson County. Along its northern section, after it passes over the I-495 "cut" that takes vehicles to the Lincoln Tunnel, New Jersey Turnpike and Rt. 3, the road intersects with 32nd Street. It's a classic urban crossroads, surrounded by buildings with a lively mix of uses—shops, fast food restaurants, apartments, senior housing, a gas station and more.

For years, the intersection became congested at peak travel times. The intersection configuration resulted in short sight distances for turning vehicles and longer than average crosswalks for pedestrians, creating safety concerns.

In 2005, Hudson County started a project to improve the intersection. It involved some creative engineering, new technology and a lot of common sense. It was completed in less than one month for under $90,000 in county funds—little money for redesigning a major intersection.

The county removed one signal that caused traffic backups and blocked streets during peak travel times; created left turn lanes with pavement symbols and signs; restriped the roadway to guide traffic through the intersection; added bold crosshatching on pedestrian crosswalks; and installed pedestrian signals that countdown the number of seconds remaining before the light changes.

"Traffic is flowing through the 32nd Street intersection better and pedestrians can make more informed crossing decisions," says Sean Keating, Senior Engineer for the county.

The project is an example of attention being given to improving travel and safety in urban areas in northern New Jersey. The pedestrian countdown signals, in particular, are being installed around the region. One study in San Francisco found that the signals resulted in a 50 percent reduction in accidents involving pedestrians.

The NJTPA is supporting the use of the signals and other low cost safety measures through its Local Safety Program—including funding upgrades to intersections along the length of Kennedy Boulevard.

Hudson County Executive Thomas DeGise says, "We're well aware that safety for drivers and pedestrians must be the top priority, but at the same time, we're finding ways to make our roads work more efficiently."

Bike/Pedestrian Trail

Old Monmouth rail line a key part of popular trail

In Monmouth County, two trails—one created on abandoned railroad tracks and the other on an old state highway—now offer pedestrians, cyclists, joggers and dog walkers a smooth path to access everything from antique stores to ice cream.

The Edgar Felix Bikeway is a prime example of the state's vision for improved bicycling and walking facilities. Nationwide, in the 1960s and 1970s, railroad consolidation resulted in thousands of miles of abandoned tracks, many of which had the potential to be converted to bike or hiking trails or linear parks. Today, from Cape May to Sussex County, New Jersey has about 20 of these so-called "rail trails" totaling more than 200 miles.

In 1995, New Jersey published the Statewide Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan, which was developed by the New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT) in partnership with the state's three Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), including the NJTPA. The plan formalized a vision for making bicycling and walking an important part of the state's transportation system.

The Edgar Felix Bikeway showed how it could be done. Established in 1971, the bikeway has continually expanded. Its namesake, Edgar H. Felix, took up bicycling for his health after retiring and actively advocated that the Borough of Manasquan purchase part of the abandoned Freehold and Jamesburg Agricultural Railroad right-of-way.

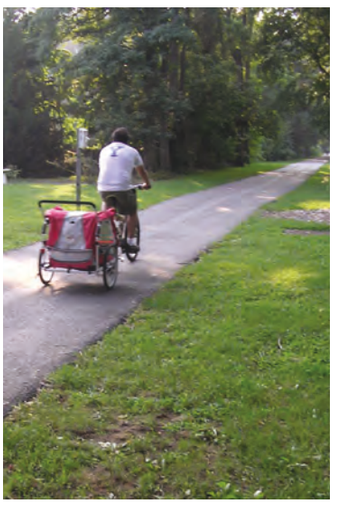
The bikeway was built on a grade rail bed and runs from Hospital Road in Wall Township, through Manasquan, and into the eastern part of the county, ending in Allenwood. From that point, the path joins the Capital to Coast Trail, continuing on to Allaire State Park, with planned extensions all the way to Trenton's Assunpink Greenway and Urban Park and the D&R Canal Bike Trail.

Not only is The Edgar Felix Bikeway a safe corridor for thousands of bicyclists in the shore region, it also serves as a path for children going to nearby recreational activities.

"The bikeway transformed a neglected railway into an asset that improves the quality of life in our county," says Monmouth County Freeholder William C. Barham. "We're proud of it."

Connecting to the 5.4 mile-Edgar Felix trail is the nearly two-mile-long Route 18 Bikeway, which winds through wooded areas and open fields to the Wall Township municipal complex and soccer fields. This paved trail, though, was not built on a rail bed like the Edgar Felix path. Rather, this "spur" trail was built along the abandoned NJ Route 18 southern right-of-way. An additional path circumvents the municipal complex, adding another mile to the trail system.

The Edgar Felix and Route 18 trails form a "T" intersection, and comprise a scenic path through residential and commercial areas, farmland, and wetlands. There is ample parking behind the police station in the municipal complex, at the Allaire Park trail head and at the Manasquan trail head on North Main Street. Safety and continuity on the trail are enhanced with ample signage alerting users to road crossings. Two small wooden bridges traverse the eight-lane Garden State Parkway.



The atmosphere is peaceful and cordial and users share a sense of community. One Allamuchy resident, who visits the trails often with his two young daughters, notes that "Everyone says 'hi.' It's neat!"

photo: Jacobs Edwards & Kelcey

Aerial view of the redesigned roundabout in Westfield, Union County (see page 2).

Mobility Matters

TRANSPORTATION ISSUES IN THE NJTPA REGION

In This Issue

Getting It Right
- Project Profiles
- Transit Art

North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority, Inc.

www.njtpa.org

North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority

Affiliated with the New Jersey Institute of Technology

One Newark Center, 17th Floor
Newark, NJ 07102

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage PAID
Permit No. 3353
Newark, NJ